



Fateful Decision

J. Robert Oppenheimer

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absence of any reliable international agreement mean resigning ourselves to surrender to the superior force of our rivals whenever such force is pressed upon us? Would this mean failure to do our share in protecting other nations which perforce look to us in aiding their defense?

My main point is that this is not a question for experts, either militarists or scientists. All they can do is to explain what the results will be if we do or do not try to develop such destructive weapons. The American people must themselves say whether they want to defend themselves with such weapons or whether they prefer to take what others may force upon them rather than resort to the destructive

action which such weapons make possible.

The familiar techniques of the opinion polls, when applied in the effort to get a fair sampling of views, may be adequate to find what we Americans think. It is possible that the result will be overwhelmingly in favor of developing the H-Bomb in case the President's military advisors are agreed that its development will strengthen our defense more than will an equal effort spent along some other line.

If this is the dominant American view, I think it ought to be known. Expressions to this effect would greatly strengthen the morale of the scientists and others whose task it would be to proceed with making the new weapons.

Fateful Decision

J. Robert Oppenheimer

THE decision to seek or not to seek international control of the A-bomb, the decision to try to make or not to make the H-bomb, are issues, rooted in complex technical matters, that nevertheless touch the very basis of our morality. There is grave danger for us in that these decisions have been taken on the basis of facts held secret. This is not because the men who must contribute to the decisions, or must make them, are lacking in wisdom; it is because wisdom itself cannot

flourish, nor even truth be determined, without the give and take of debate or criticism. The relevant facts could be of little help to an enemy; yet they are indispensable for an understanding of questions of policy. If we are wholly guided by fear, we shall fail in this time of crisis. The answer to fear cannot always lie in the dissipation of the causes of fear; sometimes it lies in courage.

Response made in the course of Mrs. Roosevelt's Round Table broadcast of February 12th.

Let Us Pledge Not to Use H-Bomb First!

At the close of the recent meeting of the Physical Society in New York, twelve of the country's prominent physicists issued the following statement:

A FEW days ago, President Truman decided that this country should go ahead with the construction of a hydrogen bomb.

This decision was one of the utmost gravity. Few of the men who publicly urged the President to make this decision can have realized its full import. Among the reports in the press was a great deal of misinformation. However, it was stated correctly that a hydrogen bomb, if it can be made, would be capable of developing a power 1,000 times greater than the present atomic bomb. New York, or any other of the greatest cities of the world, could be destroyed by a single hydrogen bomb.

We believe that no nation has the

right to use such a bomb, no matter how righteous its cause. This bomb is no longer a weapon of war but a means of extermination of whole populations. Its use would be a betrayal of all standards of morality and of Christian civilization itself.

Senator McMahon, in a speech on Thursday, February 2, has pointed out to the American people that the possession of the hydrogen bomb will not give positive security to this country. We shall not have a monopoly of this bomb, but it is certain that the Russians will be able to make one too. In the case of the fission bomb the Russians required four years to parallel our development. In the case of the hydrogen bomb they will probably need a shorter time. We must remember that we do not possess the bomb but are only developing it, and Russia has received, through indiscre-

tion, the most valuable hint that our experts believe its development possible. Perhaps the development of the hydrogen bomb has already been under way in Russia for some time. But if it was not, our decision to develop it must have started the Russians on the same program. If they had already a going program, they will redouble their efforts.

Statements in the press have given the power of the H-bomb as between 2 and 1,000 times that of the present fission bomb. Actually the thermonuclear reaction, on which the H-bomb is based, is limited in its power only by the amount of hydrogen which can be carried in the bomb. Even if the power were limited to 1,000 times that of a present atomic bomb, the step from an A-bomb to an H-bomb would be as great as that from an ordinary TNT bomb to the atom bomb.

To create such an ever-present peril for all the nations in the world is against the vital interests of both Russia and the United States. Three prominent senators have called for renewed efforts to eliminate this weapon, and other weapons of mass destruction, from the arsenals of all nations. Such efforts should be made, and made in all sincerity by both sides.

In the meantime, we urge that the United States, through its elected government, make a solemn declaration that we shall never use this bomb first. The circumstance which might force us to use it would be if we or our allies were attacked by *this* bomb. There can be only one justification for our development of the hydrogen bomb, and that is to prevent its use.

—Signed

S. K. ALLISON, Director of Institute for Nuclear Studies, University of Chicago

K. T. BAINBRIDGE, Harvard University

H. S. BETHE, Cornell University

R. B. BRODE, University of California

C. C. LAURITSEN, Director of Kellogg Radiation Laboratory, California Institute of Technology

F. W. LOOMIS, Chairman of Physics Department, University of Illinois

G. B. PEGRAM, Dean of Graduate Faculties, Columbia University

B. ROSSI, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

F. SEITZ, University of Illinois

M. A. TUVE, Director, Department of Terrestrial Magnetism, Carnegie Institution, Washington, D.C.

V. F. WEISSKOPF, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

M. G. WHITE, Princeton University